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SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB/TPP/ABT/MALAC AND GOETHERT, EAP/EP/MORIARITY
AND CHAN, EAP/ANP
USDA FOR FAS/BIG/SIMMONS, RICHEY, CLARKSON, FAS/ITP/MEYER
AND FARINA, FAS/ICD/RSED/LAIDIG, WITHERS, AND PETLOCK,
FAS/FAA/CONLON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [NZ](#)

SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND PARTICIPATION AT APEC HIGH LEVEL
POLICY DIALOGUE ON AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY

REF: USDA FAS 666920

SUMMARY

1. Embassy's Agricultural Attach and Economic officer discussed the draft workplan for the APEC High Level Policy Dialogue on Agricultural Biotechnology (HLPDAB) and ongoing capacity building initiatives on agricultural biotechnology with David Walker and Richard Graves of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Dr. Walker was recently appointed as the New Zealand Government's Senior APEC official. His office had shared information provided on the agricultural policy dialogue reftel with other New Zealand ministries. New Zealand's participation in the Biotech Dialogue is likely to continue at a modest level. This reflects both resource constraints as well as policy considerations that take into account the political sensitivity of agricultural biotechnology within New Zealand.

2. Dr. Walker candidly stated that New Zealand's 'experts' on agricultural biotechnology have not in the past placed a high priority on participating in the HLPDAB. Based on their assessment and faced with significant resource constraints, New Zealand's participation in the APEC HLPDAB is not likely to change significantly in the near-term from its modest level.

3. Agricultural Attach stressed to Dr. Walker the importance that the United States places on New Zealand's participation in the HLPDAB. The 3-year draft workplan offered New Zealand an excellent opportunity to make sure that it included initiatives and activities that supported New Zealand's goals and objectives for agricultural biotechnology. Dr. Walker agreed that New Zealand shared responsibility for making sure that the workplan was relevant for New Zealand. Dr. Walker was reminded during the discussion that he had received a copy of the workplan by email from Melissa Clarkson representing the HLPDAB Steering Committee and he was encouraged to provide comment directly to Clarkson by email, taking into account that feedback was sought by August 13.

4. Walker commented that New Zealand would like to obtain clarification and a better understanding of the definition and scope of agricultural biotechnology, as envisioned for the HLPDAB versus other APEC bodies (or international organizations such as Codex) providing technology cooperation, so as to assure that there was no duplication of effort. Also, New Zealand believes that initiatives to enhance public understanding of agricultural biotechnology should be a priority issue for the HLPDAB. These concerns may be expressed by Walker in an email exchange with Clarkson.

5. Agricultural Attach raised the subject of the farmer-to-farmer capacity building initiative scheduled for Honduras and the Investment Seminar that will be held in Malaysia in December 2004. With respect to the Honduran event, Dr. Walker commented that New Zealand placed importance on the need for achieving wider public understanding and acceptance of agricultural biotechnology. He also questioned why the event was being held in Honduras given that it is not an APEC member.

6. Agricultural Attach reminded Dr. Walker of the recent trade Mission led by the Governor of Iowa to New Zealand followed by a reverse mission organized by MFAT to Iowa designed in part to promote investment in biotechnology. With New Zealand's interest in promoting investment opportunities for New Zealand's agricultural biotech industry, Agricultural Attach raised the usefulness of of the investment seminar organized under the HLPDAB to promote development of New Zealand's biotech sector.

17. Dr. Walker emphasized that timing of Policy Dialogue meetings was an important factor in determining New Zealand's participation. Dr. Walker will attend the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM I) that will be held next year in Korea. The 2005 Agricultural Biotechnology Policy Dialogue meeting is expected to be scheduled on the margins of SOM I. Richard Graves, MFAT's Senior Policy Officer for APEC, pointed out that although Dr. Walker will be in Korea, he may be unable to attend the policy dialogue if it conflicts with preparatory events being held for SOM I. Coordination of APEC meeting schedules is critical to ensure New Zealand's participation at HLPDAB meetings.

COMMENT

18. Attending the Biotech Policy Dialogue does pose serious resource issues for New Zealand, both human and financial. However, its participation is largely a question of priorities and benefits. New Zealand will continue to find it difficult to take a leadership role in promoting the adoption of biotechnology issues within APEC while its own domestic policy environment continues to impede development of New Zealand's biotech sector. That said, David Walker, New Zealand's newly appointed Senior APEC Official, is likely to place a higher priority and take a more active role in the Agricultural Biotechnology Dialogue than his predecessor. Walker attended the last HLPDAB meeting held in Chile while still serving as Deputy Head of the New Zealand Embassy in Washington.

SWINDELLS